

**Parents...
Set a Good Example**

- Install and maintain smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.
- Plan and practice fire escape drills in your home.
- Regularly inspect your home for fire hazards.
- Always use "safety sense" when making or using fire.
- Point out to your children the safety rules you and others are following throughout the day.

**Teachers, Counselors,
and Community Leaders...
Take Responsibility
for Fire Safety**

- Teach fire safety in preschool through high school programs.
- Participate in training to learn about juvenile firesetters.
- Help raise awareness in your community about juvenile firesetters.
- Know the resources in your community to help juvenile firesetters -- or help develop a juvenile firesetters program.

Where To Go For Help!

Your Local Fire Department

Your State Fire Services

For more information or copies of this publication, please contact:

**Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Fire Administration**

16825 South Seton Avenue
Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727
800-561-3356
www.usfa.fema.gov

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Juvenile Firesetters

What You Can Do!



FEMA



Juvenile Firesetters

In Rochester, New York, a two-year-old, playing with matches, started a fire that took his life and the lives of five family members.

In Roanoke, Virginia, a seven-year-old boy set fire to a chair in an abandoned building; the fire spread to an adjacent house and trapped an elderly woman.

In Passaic, New Jersey, a firefighter was killed and hundreds of people lost their homes in a fire started by a group of teenage boys.

These tragic events are not isolated incidents. In a typical year, in the U.S., 300 people are killed and \$190 million in property is destroyed in fires set by children. Children themselves are usually the victims of these fires, accounting for 85 of every 100 lives lost.

The number of fires set by children is growing. It is a problem that needs the attention of parents, teachers, counselors, and community leaders, in cooperation with fire and law enforcement officers.

Why Children Set Fires

Most experts agree that the best way to understand firesetting behavior is to look at where and why children set fires. They believe that there are two basic types of children who start fires.

Curious Firesetters usually are 2- to 7- year-olds whose fascination with fire leads them to “play” with it to find out how it feels, how it burns, and what it does.

They do not understand fire’s destructive potential.

Although curiosity is a normal part of children’s growth and development, parents and other adults who discover that a child is playing with fire should take it very seriously.

Problem Firesetters also can be very young, but generally are 5 to 17 years old. In contrast to the curious firesetter, however, these youngsters light fires because of emotional or mental disturbances ranging from mild to severe. A crisis in the child’s life, such as moving to a new area, a divorce, or death could trigger firesetting behavior. Or, a more serious disturbance could be the cause. Chronic behaviors such as a poor relationship with other children, cruelty to animals, and extreme mood changes are a few of the traits revealed by data on juvenile firesetters.

What You Can Do!

Parents...

Teach Your Child About Fire

- Fire is a tool we use to heat our homes or cook our food.
- It is not a toy.
- Fire is dangerous -- it can kill.
- All fires -- even small ones -- can spread quickly.
- Even adults must follow special safety rules for fire.

Control Your Child’s Access to Fire

- Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach of children -- even a 2-year old can operate a cigarette lighter.
- Never allow anyone to use lighters or matches in an unsafe manner in your home.
- Never leave stoves or lighted candles unattended.
- Teach children to bring to your attention any matches or lighters they find.